

MONTANA STATEWIDE EPHT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

September 22, 2005

Attendees

Rachelle Deskins, USFDA/ MEHA
Becky Bacon, DPHHS/Informatics
Sib Clack, DPHHS/MBOMS
Jim Edgar, DPHHS/Vital Stats
Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR
Tom Ellerhoff, DEQ
Alex Gorman, WVE
Chris Korhonen, DPHHS/EPHT
Marjean Magraw, DPHHS/EPHT
Lou Olcott, DPHHS/Biomonitoring/Lab
Anne Hedges, MEIC
Joanne Oreskovich, DPHHS/BRFSS
Amy Bamber, MT Dept. of Agriculture

Roman Hendrickson, MD
Andrij Holian, Director UM CEHS
Diana Vanek, UM CEHS
Judy Murphy, MT Labor and Industry
Jim Hill, Director MT Digital Library/NRIS
Scott Straessler, NRIS
Steve Helgerson, State Medical Officer
Special Guests:
Ken Fitzgerald, Rocky Boy Tribal Health, EH
Ben Schmidt, Missoula County Health Dept., EH
Mosey Hardin, EPHT Intern UC Santa Cruz

Meeting Objectives:

- Evaluate progress over first three years and receive input on next steps
- Provide updates on current EPHT activities including reports of local health department contractors
- Reports from selected partners- networking opportunities (UM. Depart of AG, MEIC, Cancer Control Plan)
- Review MT EPHT Logic Model and add to recommended outcomes for the next 1-2 years
- Plan next meeting and suggest new agenda items

EPHT PROJECT UPDATES

Montana EPHT's application for the 10-month cost extension (October 2005 – July 2006) was accepted and begins 10/1/2005. Leah Dreyer accepted a new position and is no longer working for EPHT. We thank her for her contributions, especially for her exceptional work on EPHT publications over the past two years.

Program Activities/Contracts: The Center for Law and the Public Health is reviewing current MT laws to develop recommended enhancements to our public health laws that will allow clear authority for EPHT to collect public health data for surveillance. EPHT has partnered with Montana DEQ to improve standards for environmental data, clean existing data, and develop an integrated data repository called CEDARS which will have a GIS component. MSU Extension Service (Mike Vogel, PhD) and Montana Bureau of Mines (Kate Miller, PhD) are working with EPHT to compile data on radon levels in homes and the atmosphere across Montana. The Bureau of Mines will be working towards analyzing the correlation between geologic features and radon to see how closely geologic layers are predictive of increased radon.

When completed EPHT will make information on this project available on the web. An interagency “Fish and Contaminants Working Group” continues to be active. They have provided outreach education to public health nurses, and will be attending a demonstration of software developed in WA State that can combine fish tissue data with recommended consumption levels to provide a transparent process for developing fish consumption guidelines. The training will be held September 28-29th in Helena.

New local EH assessment sites have been selected from 7 proposals received. The 2005-2006 sites selected include: Sanders County, Richland County, and Beaverhead County. Northern Cheyenne reservation was unable to start their assessment last year and will be extended to this year. Treasure Co. was selected as an alternate site if funding is available.

NRIS at Montana State Digital Library has built interactive version of County Health Profiles as part of a larger project to disseminate information to the public through a planned Montana health data website. This site will be a central source of health and environmental health data for Montana. The test site for interactive County Health Profiles can be viewed at <http://nriss.mt.gov/epht>

EPHT EPI Report: EPHT has helped to support the Montana Biomonitoring project which is in the process of collecting samples of well water and urine samples from residents drinking from those wells in areas with known high arsenic levels. A summer intern, Steven Onofrak from Emory University began collecting samples from homes this summer. Another intern who was also from Emory University did a summer research project on Gastroschisis in Montana. Laurie Helzer did chart reviews across the state to gather more information on cases of this birth defect in Montana. A final analysis of information gathered will be completed by the department’s epidemiologists. A report on Mesothelioma in Montana was started by Dr. Mike Spence before his retirement. Chris Korhonen with input from Department staff has finalized the report. We will post it on the EPHT website when published. Chris is also finishing a Measures Report on environmental health indicators in Montana.

Work was completed to geocode two years of birth certificate data from MT Vital Stats with assistance from NRIS staff. We will also start geocoding the birth defects registry. When completed we will be able to better utilize these data sets for trend analysis. The Informatics Section of the Public Health Systems Improvement Bureau, an EPHT partner, has developed a data system for tracking blood lead level results which are sent to DPHHS from any lab completing a lab analysis for a Montana resident. This system will eventually allow registered users web access to relevant data. This system is PHIN compliant and a first step towards developing data integration and dissemination of data to registered partners to improve public health. In the past information was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

EPHT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

An Executive Committee of the EPHT Advisory Group was formed. Members agreeing to participate include Dr. Dana Headapohl, Occupational Medicine, Missoula St Pats; Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR; Curtis Noonan PhD, Epidemiologist UM CEHS; Wade Hill, PhD, MSU Bozeman College of Nursing; Gary Carter, Billings Area Office Indian Health Services; Alex Gorman, Director of Science and Research at Women's Voices of the Earth; Dan Dennehy, Health Officer, Butte-Silverbow Health Department; and Tom Ellerhoff, MT Department of Environmental Quality. The committee will be invited to participate in a meeting on PH law modernization and a review of legislation related to EPHT and EH surveillance in November or December 2005.

Local Contractor Reports

Rocky Boy Tribal Health Department was one of two sites funded in 2004-2005 to conduct a community environmental health assessment. Ken Fitzgerald from the Environmental Health Department provided a presentation on their environmental health assessment process. Ken described some of the benefits/lessons learned and challenges of the assessment process as:

- Benefits
 - A means to improve consumer confidence in the rural water distribution system
 - Awareness to education
 - Focus driven assessment
 - Allowed the community to speak/address their concerns
- Lessons learned
 - More involvement w/media
 - Survey briefness (environmental justice needed defining)
 - Needs to be more communication between public health, environmental health and environmental protection.
- Challenges
 - Funding for medium and long term goals
 - Involvement of Tribal Business Committee (Health Board)
 - Involvement of other departments
 - Time to complete tasks with limited staff

Missoula City-County Health Department was the second site funded. Ben Schmidt from the Missoula Environmental Health Department gave a presentation on the process in Missoula. Highlights are given below:

- Interdisciplinary steering committee from Health Department staff was formed to facilitate/guide the process and to write the reports.
- Board of Health was involved/informed about the survey and the purpose.
- Sixteen member Citizen Environmental Health Advisory Committee (EHAC) appointed by the Board of Health.
- Provided broad perspective on environmental health issues.

- Connected health department staff with other members of the community involved with public health.
- Guided development of the survey (final survey written and done by U. of MT).
- Interpreted survey results and helped determine appropriate survey follow-up (focus groups).
- Picked top areas of EH concern.
- Final prioritization will be completed in October.

Partner Reports

University of Montana Andrij Holian, PhD, Director of the Center for Environmental Health Sciences and Diana Vanek, Outreach Coordinator at the Center.

1. Will publish a paper on the completed pilot project linking air quality data with hospital discharge data in Western Montana showing a correlation with asthma and increased particulate matter (PM).
2. Pursuing funding for research on health effects of meth lab exposures
3. Waiting to hear about funding from the Health Effects Institute for Libby wood stove replacement study. Libby is the only area west of the Mississippi that exceeds EPA standards for PM.
 - research at UM showed wood stoves make up 82% of outdoor air pollution
 - plans to replace 1000 stoves
 - goal to get Libby compliant for PM standards and improve health
 - planning an analysis of children's health and exposures
4. Recipient of a Science Education Award. They were funded by NIH for 5 years. They are partnering with Salish Kootenai Community College. Activities will include:
 - mobile environmental health science lab for rural youth
 - working with curriculum specialists from tribal areas K-12 (Blackfeet and Salish Kootenai Tribes)
 - focus on water quality
 - will expand their Air Toxics education program for high schools to include Libby students
 - hiring an education coordinator
 - forming bridges between research and communities
5. Health and Human Performance Lab at UM interested in partnering on air quality project looking at health benefits of reduced particulate matter

Montana Department of Agriculture Amy Bamber

1. A training manual called "Integrated Pest Management in Schools" was created in 1/1996. This manual was created as a requirement of the Montana Model School Integrated Pest and Pesticide Safety Program Act of 1993. The intent of this law is to encourage both reduced risk from and reduced use of pesticides in the school environment. They plan to upgrade the training manual. Today's handouts included:
2. MT Pesticides Act and Administrative Rules
3. MT Agricultural Chemical Ground Water Protection Act

Activities at Dept. of AG include:

- yearly monitoring of wells for agricultural chemicals
- monitoring for the presence of approximately 75 pesticides, nitrates and nitrites.

There have been no detections of pesticides near or above the human health standards set by DEQ and EPA, but there are areas of the state with high nitrate levels. This year the department began isotope testing high nitrate samples to help determine the source of the nitrate.

-special focus areas each year with increased monitoring. This year the focus has been the Yellowstone watershed.

4. Planning to export county and watershed level monitoring data on agricultural chemicals to NRIS for public access when database is complete—January 2006.

Montana Environmental Information Center Ann Hedges

Formed a coalition with includes Montana Public Health Association, Montana Nurses Association, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, Association of Churches, Several tribes, Healthcare providers and advocacy groups. This group supports a policy initiative to limit coal fire power plant emissions of mercury in Montana. Provided fact sheet on mercury which will be posted on the EPHT website.

Comprehensive Cancer Joanne Oreskovich

Accepting comments on Comprehensive Cancer Plan now. Link:

<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/PHSD/Breast-Cervical/cancer-control-index.shtml> (bottom of page)

Suggestions from Advisory Group Members for future activities:

1. Link with veterinarian groups or state veterinarian
2. Increase data for cancer control plan
3. Bring industry, insurance, dept of transportation to table
4. Get legislators involved
5. EJ needs assessment

Next Meeting: January 2006

Suggested Agenda Items:

- NRIS: county health profiles, health data website
- Funded EH projects completed at the local level
- MSU update on mercury and American Indian women study
- Fish and Contaminants working group update
- DEQ integration and website improvements
- UM- health effects of burning biomass
- State Veterinarian. What zoonotic diseases do they track?